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Weinberger Gives Understated View Of Soviet Might

Last week, with much fanfare, Defense Secretary Caspar W. Weinberger released a 99-page assessment of Soviet military power in hopes of persuading the American public and our NATO allies that the Russian war machine poses a serious threat to Western security.

But Weinberger didn't reveal the whole story; for some reason. A top-secret document obtained by my associate Dale Van Atta shows that the situation is even worse than Weinberger described it.

The document is the current Military Posture Statement prepared by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. It was the principal source of Weinberger's public report.

Some of Weinberger's omissions were minor, such as his description of Soviet long-range air forces as "more than 800 strike and support aircraft," when the Joint Chiefs' report puts the number at 874 deployed at 25 airfields throughout the Soviet Union.

Some were more serious. For example, referring to the Soviets' electronic jamming and interception techniques, Weinberger did not add this ominous appraisal by the Joint

Chiefs: "The Russians 'can monitor and counter U.S. radar and communications signals from ground, air, naval and space platforms.' That pretty well covers the field, and the Russians obviously know they have this capability. But Weinberger chose not to disclose this to the American people and our European allies.

At another point, the defense secretary made a brief reference to the Russians' ability to reload their intercontinental ballistic missile launchers. But he omitted the Joint Chiefs' admission that our intelligence agencies have so far been unable to come up with important details of the Soviets' reloading capability. "The time required to refurbish and reload ICBM launchers is not known, nor is the survivability of the silo launcher or key logistics and support functions," the secret posture statement acknowledges.

One of the most disturbing sections of the Joint Chiefs' report concerned anti-ballistic missile defense. Weinberger didn't even touch on the subject in his public report.

As I reported last May, the Russians have been feverishly developing their ABM system, despite the strict limitations of the 1972 U.S.-Soviet ABM treaty. The United States, meanwhile, has let its ABM program lag.

The secret report notes that the Soviets are working "on an ABM system—the ABM-X-3—which

could be deployed rapidly to defend large parts of the Soviet landmass." This suggests a significant mobility that has no U.S. counterpart.

In addition, the Joint Chiefs reported, the Russians have huge phased-array radar networks under construction that would spot and zero in on incoming missiles for Soviet ABM interceptors. They even pinpointed the four construction sites and warned that work at the last-named site "may now be complete," or will be soon.

"Another large phased-array radar recently was identified under construction north of Moscow," the Joint Chiefs reported. "Although it is too early to determine its function with confidence, it probably is designed for battle management of the Moscow area BMD (ballistic missile defense) system.

"The Soviets have been deploying and testing an ABM-X-3 system at Sary Shagan for over 15 years. Primary efforts appear to be devoted toward development of a discrimination ability, rather than operational deployments."

The secret report points to recent activity around Moscow as evidence that "a launcher replacement program is under way." The ABM treaty permits 100 launchers around Moscow; in 1979, there were 64, but last year this was reduced to 32. This suggests the Soviets are planning to replace Moscow's missile defense system with improved ABMs.